

BIRDS IN STUDIO AND ON THE HILLSIDE.¹

(1) THE second volume of Mr. Thorburn's beautiful book includes the rest of the crows, the larks, the picarian birds, the diurnal birds of prey, the owls, cormorants, and some of the herons. Many of these are large birds, and it has not been possible to figure so many of them on one plate. Two species—the golden eagle and the eagle owl—have plates to themselves, and these are most beautiful pictures. Mr. Thorburn is very successful with owls, which must be most difficult birds to paint, and he is famous for his pictures of eagles. The golden eagle is drawn flying along a steep hillside and carrying a mountain hare. The author writes that when an eagle is flying "the curious notched pinion feathers may be clearly seen, separated like the fingers of a hand." This is well shown in the plate. The introduction of certain striking plants which grow in the haunts of various birds is continued with most pleasing effect. Thus the Egyptian nightjar lies on the sand beside that thick, fleshy-leaved plant with large pink, yellow-centred flowers familiar to visitors to North Africa. The common nightjar is figured flying and thus displaying the curious white spots on the underside of the wing. As this volume includes the eagles, hawks, and falcons—favourite studies of the artist—the plates are, if anything, more pleasing than those in the first volume.

The third volume includes the rest of the herons and the allied species, and the swans, geese, ducks, pigeons, game-birds, rails, and the great bustard. The grouping of the different species on the plates is very successful; thus the swans occupy one plate, the four "grey" geese another, and the pigeons a third, thus affording the best opportunity of comparing the small differences in the colouring of allied species. The frontispiece, which shows the striking attitudes assumed by the male great bustards in spring when courting, is a fine picture. The author's acquaintance with the Scotch Highlands and their birds has served

him well when treating of the black grouse and the ptarmigan, the latter forming the subject of a fine plate, while the letterpress contains some interesting observations on this bird of the mountain and the mist.

(2) Under the title "Hill Birds of Scotland" we have a charming and most interesting account of twenty-four species of birds, and are rather at a



FIG. 1.—Nest of the oyster-catcher. From "Hill Birds of Scotland."

loss to know why some of them should be so designated in particular. The author's personal experiences and field notes are most interesting. But there is also introduced into the text a large amount of matter derived from other sources, and apparently sometimes from hearsay. Some of this cannot be considered as trustworthy. There are statements (for which no authority is given)

¹ (1) "British Birds." Written and Illustrated by A. Thorburn. Vol. ii., pp. vi+72+plates 21-40. Vol. iii., pp. vi+87+plates 41-60. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915.) Price 12. 11s. 6d. net each volume.

(2) "Hill Birds of Scotland." By Seton Gordon. Pp. xii+300. (London: Edward Arnold, 1915.) Price 12s. 6d. net.

which are hard to accept and must surely have been founded on hearsay evidence, and perhaps too readily believed. We are told that when the blaeberrys have ripened, the woodcocks betake themselves to the hillsides and consume great quantities of the fruit! With regard to the statement that "deer, calves, and lambs" are taken by eagles, we wonder whether this may be a slip for "deer-calves and lambs," which sounds much more likely to be true. The book might have been smaller with advantage had it been confined to the relation of the author's most valuable observations. But a considerable amount of space is occupied with descriptions of the plumage of the birds treated of, and accounts of their distribution within and outside the British islands. Both these subjects seem to us to be beyond the province of the book. The descriptions seem to be unnecessary, and in some cases inadequate, while of the accounts of distribution it must be said that they are open to criticism. For instance, we are told that "there is no bird which has so

there are now only two pairs of them breeding in Britain. The extermination seems to have been effected mainly by sheep farmers and shepherds, their hatred of the bird sometimes prompting them to acts of unnecessary and cold-blooded cruelty.

There are some things in the book which might well be altered in a second edition. The author thinks that in our language there is no distinctive name for the peculiar evening flight of the woodcock, and treats "Röding" as only a Scandinavian one. But "road" is surely English, and the well-known tracks through covers pursued by woodcocks have long been called 'cock-roads. It is scarcely correct to say that prior to the nineteenth century no case of the woodcock nesting in Britain was recorded. Willughby (1678) mentions that they bred sometimes in England. White (1789) records nests, and Pennant (1776), Walcot (1789), and Lewin (1797) all record woodcocks breeding with us.

There is in the opinion of west-country ornithologists no ground for believing that the dotterel ever bred on the Mendip Hills. And the observation that this bird "is the only representative of the widely distributed and extensive group [of waders] to restrict her clutch always to three hostages to fortune" shows a want of knowledge of these birds. For, not to mention some others, the normal clutch laid by the Kentish plover consists of three eggs only.

There are between thirty and forty illustrations, the most pleasing of which show the wild scenery affected by the birds treated of. Others show the nests or young of birds, and we

notice occasionally the want of consideration for the feelings and interests of both sitting and young birds, which is sometimes regrettable, on the part of enthusiastic bird-photographers.

The publishers allow us to reproduce a beautiful picture of the haunts of those oyster-catchers which go far inland and high up to breed—the hills in the background with a fresh coat of snow, and the bulky collection of dead heather stems brought together by this erratic bird when (as it does sometimes) it constructs a nest in the true sense of the term; also a photograph of a dotterel going to her nest.



FIG. 2.—Dotterel going to the nest. From "Hill Birds of Scotland."

wide a range as the golden eagle—in fact, it is met with almost throughout the world."

One of the pleasantest chapters in the book is that on the snow bunting. A curious incident is related showing the undoubted love of coolness which drives this arctic bird to the high Scotch mountains. One very hot day a bird which usually frequented a scree was found on a dwindling snowfield seeking relief from the heat. At times he would seek to cool himself by running over the snow with his head half-buried beneath the surface, and throwing up a furrow as from a diminutive snow-plough.

The oyster-catcher (a name which we read at first with surprise among hill-birds) appears to be only a winter visitor to the eastern seaboard of Scotland—or such parts of it as the author is familiar with—and to retire to the hills to breed. Early in March oyster-catchers leave the river estuaries and make their way in pairs up the rivers—the Don and Spey, for instance. Near the source of the Spey the bird reaches, and is numerous on, a flat 1500 ft. above sea-level. We regret to read that the white-tailed eagle has decreased enormously during the last thirty years, and that

SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN BREWING PRACTICE.

IN his address to the Institute of Brewing, of which an abstract was published in *NATURE* of July 6, Dr. Horace Brown has given a very fascinating account of the gradual introduction of scientific method into the brewery, and his reminiscences, which extend over rather more than half a century, enable us to appreciate very